2016 Federally-Mandated Hope Count Finds 12 Percent Decline in Street Homeless on the Night of the Count

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City plans new quarterly counts beginning in May

First monthly HOME-STAT dashboard shows new individual-by-individual approach to help bring New Yorkers in off the streets

NEW YORK—The annual federally-mandated Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE) street homeless survey found that 2,794 homeless individuals were living on the streets of New York City in February 2016, 12 percent fewer than last year and 36 percent fewer than the first count in 2005, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced today. In addition, the Mayor announced that beginning in May, the City is starting the first ever quarterly nighttime street counts to complement the federal HOPE count requirement and provide more information to target services to bring New Yorkers in from the streets.

“The city has made smart, strategic investments to improve our ability to identify and serve homeless New Yorkers. The decrease found by the HOPE count shows that progress is possible, and the new HOME-STAT dashboard and our quarterly counts will ensure that we have accurate information about where and who the street homeless are, so we can continue the hard work of finding them a home,” said Mayor de Blasio.

The City also released the first monthly Homeless Outreach & Mobile Engagement Street Action Teams (HOME-STAT) dashboard reporting on the new individual-by-individual approach to address street homelessness, which shows the outreach program is currently serving:

- 861 street homeless clients actively on the case load,
- 1,604 identified likely chronic street homeless clients being offered services, and
- 952 clients in transitional housing still receiving support.

In March, HOME-STAT brought 149 clients off the street into transitional housing and placed 46 clients into permanent housing. The dashboard allows New Yorkers to see how HOME-STAT is reaching street homeless individuals. On May 2, the City will conduct its first quarterly nighttime count of street homeless, as part of the new HOME-STAT initiative to target services to each individual on the streets, instead of a one-size-fits-all approach.
Key findings of the HOPE count include:

- The 2016 total of 2,794 is a 12 percent decline from the 3,182 unsheltered individuals in 2015 and is the second annual decline in a row.
- The 2016 total is a 36 percent decline from the 4,395 in the first count in 2005.
- There was a 20 percent decrease, the first in seven years, in subway system homeless, going from 1,976 in 2015 to 1,573 in 2016. Several factors that have contributed to this significant decrease:
  - DHS and the MTA collaborated to co-fund subway outreach beginning in July 2014. HOPE 2016 represents a view of the first full year that the program has been up and running.
  - The collaboration brought an increase in over $5 million in funding, resulting in the number of staff doing outreach in the subways increasing from 20 to 111. Outreach teams also expanded their hours to 24/7, consistent with the street teams.
  - Because it is now managed by the DHS unit that oversees street operations, the subway team now has access to substantially more transitional housing resources, such as safe havens.

As part of HOME-STAT, the most comprehensive homelessness street outreach initiative in any major US city, today the City also unveiled its monthly public “dashboard” to increase transparency of data and progress toward reducing homelessness in New York City. The dashboard will include daily and monthly information generated by the HOME-STAT canvassing, Street Outreach team engagement, and data from the City’s new comprehensive quarterly nighttime counts. Current dashboard data indicate that HOME-STAT is already serving more than 4,000 of New York City’s homeless population – individuals still on the street and those recently moved into transitional housing who continue to receive support so they remain in housing.

“It’s encouraging to see these new HOME-STAT numbers because they indicate that our efforts against homelessness are making progress, whether it’s outreach to New Yorkers living on the streets or housing for those living in shelter,” said Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks. “There is much more to be done but we are seeing that reaching out can really help, and with new quarterly counts in addition to the HOPE count our ability to reach New Yorkers in need will be even greater.”

The annual HOPE count is mandated by federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and is conducted throughout the U.S. as part of an effort to track homelessness. This year’s City count was held from midnight to 4 a.m. on February 9, 2016. The City’s methodology for estimating the size of the street homeless population through the HOPE survey has been recognized by the HUD as a national model. The methodology helps to ensure accuracy by employing decoys, who are individuals trained to appear homeless and placed throughout the City the night of the count to test whether survey volunteers are thoroughly covering their assigned areas. The number of street homeless individuals counted by volunteers is adjusted on the basis of how many decoys were not identified, a procedure which serves as a quality assurance measure. Similar to past years, 85 percent of the decoys were identified in 2016, confirming the accuracy of the count.

"We are pleased to be launching HOME-STAT’s monthly dashboard and quarterly nighttime count as part of the administration’s goal to paint a comprehensive and transparent picture of street homelessness," said Mayor’s Office of Operations Director Mindy Tarlow. "It is through this deeper understanding that we will be able to create programs and improve systems to better engage and support people living on the street and help them transition to housing."

"Homelessness is a crisis that our city cannot ignore," said Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito. "The drop in the number of homeless New Yorkers living on the street is welcome news, as we continue to work toward providing the necessary services to end homelessness in New York City. We must continue the work to help our most vulnerable residents and facilitate a transition into services that will help homeless New Yorkers rebuild their lives."

"I am heartened by the progress indicated by the recent results of the HOPE count," said Council Member Steve Levin, Chair of the General Welfare Committee. "Although there is still much we can do to ensure all New Yorkers have a safe place to call home, we are making some real headway in connecting individuals living on the streets to shelter and essential services. Ongoing access to timely data through HOME-STAT will enable us to identify areas for improvement."

"Without information on the needs and number of unsheltered homeless people, the city can’t provide the services and resources needed to help get homeless New Yorkers off the streets and into stable, permanent housing," said City Council Majority Leader Jimmy Van Bramer. "I’m grateful for the 3,000 volunteers who joined the city for its yearly HOPE count to help serve our fellow New Yorkers who live on the streets."

"The HOPE count has proven to be an effective measure concerning the current homeless population in our city," said Council Member Vincent Gentile. "This year’s canvassing revealed a 12% decline in the homeless population. The new dashboard will continue to build upon this effort, providing open data that will greatly assist the tracking and organization of this information as our goal of reducing homelessness citywide remains at the forefront."

"Every New Yorker must do their part to help the homeless off the streets," said Council Member Ben Kallos. "One of the best ways to help is to join the annual—and soon to be quarterly—HOPE count, where we get a first-hand account of how many individuals are homeless on our streets. Thank you to the Department of Homeless Services and the over 3,000 volunteers who helped perform the Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE) this year."

"New York City is taking bold and unprecedented steps to help our fellow New Yorkers off the streets," said Council Member Mark Levine. "By getting an accurate count of street homelessness, we are directing an increasing number of people to the services they need. I’m pleased by our city’s progress that’s making a real difference in the lives of some of our most vulnerable New Yorkers."

"We all witness people on the street who struggle with homelessness every day, and the HOPE count is a great way to give back and support those individuals so they get adequate

funding for supportive services from the federal government. A huge thank you is warranted to the Department of Homeless Services for organizing the event and the thousands of volunteers who make it happen," said Council Member Helen Rosenthal.

“The 38% reduction in street homelessness in the Bronx over the past year shows major progress, and testifies to the strength of partnerships between providers and the Administration,” said BronxWorks Assistant Executive Director Scott Auwarter. “These numbers indicate that the Administration’s focus on this problem is showing positive results. The new HOME-STAT program and the emphasis on data collection also makes it possible to quickly refocus our energy on the areas that need it most. By adding resources, with a focus on flexible models, we are more effectively targeting those resistant to traditional shelters and convincing them to come off of the streets. In addition, the Administration’s focus on expanding housing solutions will ensure that these individuals can be moved into permanent housing that will meet their long term goals.”

“Nobody wants to see anyone live on the street. HOME-STAT allows us to encourage more people to come indoors and has provided additional resources which will allow us to offer more services to all individuals engaged,” said Goddard Executive Director Stephan Russo. “This, combined with providing more permanent housing, is how we can truly help people.”

“Breaking Ground’s outreach teams have been working incredibly hard to bring homeless New Yorkers indoors, and we are pleased that our efforts are paying off through reduced street homelessness, said Breaking Ground President and CEO Brenda Rosen. “We thank the de Blasio administration for their commitment of new resources and data management tools which will enable us to reach more homeless New Yorkers in need.”

“I am encouraged by today’s announcement of significantly declining numbers of homeless individuals in the subway system, and in the City overall,” said BRC Executive Director Muzzy Rosenblatt. “This result is indicative of the hard work of our incredible staff, who never give up on the people we see and serve, which is only possible because of the increased focus and commitment of the de Blasio Administration and the MTA, who in partnership have provided BRC with much needed additional resources that made this success possible. Mayor de Blasio, Deputy Mayor Palacio and Commissioner Banks experienced the success that this data reflects, joining our subway outreach teams this past winter and successfully offering a hand up, not a hand out to the homeless in the subways.”

For detailed information on the methodology and results of this year’s HOPE survey, please visit the DHS website at www.nyc.gov/dhs.

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